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Linda McCulloch  
Superintendent

### **2005 State of Education Address State Superintendent Linda McCulloch February 11, 2005**

Good afternoon. I'm so very pleased to be here with you today.

Thank you President Tester, Speaker Matthews, Senator Keenan, Representative Wanzenried and Representative Brown for bringing us together to focus on Montana's children and their future.

I'd also like to recognize Governor Schweitzer and my other colleagues and friends in the Executive and Judicial branches of Montana Government, as well as the Public Service Commissioners.

And a very special thank you to my husband, Bill, for being here with me and supporting my dedication to Montana's kids for another four years.

I begin my State of Education Address with sincere words of thanks for the thousands of dedicated teachers, administrators, school staff and trustees. You work tirelessly, helping Montana's children learn and prepare for successful lives. Simply put, you change lives.

One of those educators is Bud Williams, my Deputy Superintendent. Every day, Bud brings 30 years of experience, expertise and caring to the kids of Montana.

Would all educators, school staff or trustees in the audience, both on the floor and in the gallery, please stand so we may recognize you?

From all of us here, and from all Montanans. Thank you!

I'd like to specifically thank the kids who are watching this address live using video streaming technology. One of those schools is Lockwood School in Billings. Please join me in greeting Mrs. Johnson and her students.

#### Defining Quality Education

This 59th Legislative Session will be forever remembered as the session that 150 citizens defined an education system that will affect every single Montanan, their children and their grandchildren. It is an historic opportunity. An opportunity that constantly returns us to an event 33 years ago.

It was a defining moment in 1972 when the delegates to the Montana Constitutional Convention put aside partisanship, regional differences and personal agendas and focused on Montana's

*"It is the mission of the Office of Public Instruction to improve teaching and learning through communication, collaboration, advocacy, and accountability to those we serve."*

future. Today, when each of us takes the oath of office, we swear to uphold the document they created. Their task was daunting, but their achievement is resounding.

In the area of education, they agreed upon 15 powerful words:

*“The legislature shall provide a basic system of free quality public elementary and secondary schools.”*

It is up to you to make the most of the opportunity before you -- to make that constitutional statement a reality – and have an impact on future generations.

This session is about “moving education forward in Montana.” Lawsuits have been filed, hearings have been held, and the courts have ruled. That is past. Now the solution is back where it belongs – in your hands. Your task, like that of the delegates to the constitutional convention, is to focus on the future – on the quality of the schools your children, and their children, will attend.

Let me talk about what these 15 words in our Constitution means to me:

Our country was built on the very dream of “wanting better for our children than we have ourselves.” I am living my father’s dream. I was the first in my father’s family to graduate from High School. My father left school in the eighth grade to go to work and help feed his younger brothers and sisters. He wanted more for his children, and he knew education was the key to making that possible. My parents sacrificed much for us. Their goal was simple: they wanted us to have a better life than they had.

My story is not unique. Parents all across Montana know the meaning of a quality education. It is in the dreams they have for their children.

Now it is your chance to define a quality education that makes parents’ dreams a reality for their children. It must be a definition that encompasses both the aspirations of those dreams, and the tangible reality that makes those dreams achievable.

- A quality education must include standards set forth by the Board of Public Education.
- It must provide assessments to make sure our children are succeeding.
- It must address the needs of Montana’s low-income children, at-risk youth, and special needs students -- both challenged and gifted.
- It must reflect the needs of our American Indian students.
- It must allow us to recruit and retain high-quality teachers.
- It must allow us to provide kids with textbooks, library materials, and the technology they need to compete in a changing world.
- It must provide safe school buildings and buses.
- And finally, it must be a quality education that will continue to adapt as times change.

Educating Montana’s children is a complex process in today’s world. The definition you will come up with will undoubtedly be complex as well. But, the ideas are simple. It is about our future, our economy and our KIDS!

Indian Education for All

You also have an opportunity and an obligation to make up for 30 years of neglect to recognize another promise made in our Constitution -- to recognize the distinct and unique cultural heritage of Montana's American Indians.

While American Indians make up about 6 percent of our total state population, American Indian students make up about 11 percent of our students in public schools. It is the only growing student population.

There is an alarming gap in the achievement levels of Indian and non-Indian students in Montana. Did you know that almost half of Montana's American Indian students do not graduate from high school? These factors affect the lives of students, their parents, their communities, and the economy of Montana. All students in Montana must achieve at the very highest level to which they are capable. Anything less is absolutely unacceptable!

Last fall, I hosted an Indian Education Summit that brought together 200 educators and leaders to help me find answers to reducing the achievement gap and to fully implement Indian Education for All Montanans.

All Montana students, and frankly, all of us, deserve the opportunity to understand the rich American Indian culture and history specific to Montana.

Thank you, Governor Schweitzer, for making available in your state budget the opportunity for my office to begin our significant work on Indian Education for All.

We want to do it right and respectfully, which is why the Montana Advisory Council on American Indian Education will be so vital to this effort.

As a teacher I wanted to do the right thing when teaching about Montana's Native people. But I was not always sure how to go about it. It is absolutely critical that all Montana teachers get the assistance they need to fully implement Indian Education for All. I am excited about bringing together educators and other experts to develop resources and hands-on materials to use in our classrooms.

I am thrilled to have this chance to finally make MCA 20-1-501 more than a paper promise!

### Develop Funding System

What stands before us is an historic task to develop a funding system. We must venture into uncharted waters and understandably, there will be some trepidation. It is quite a task. Working together we will develop a funding system that works for all our students.

After more than a decade of inadequate funding, this process will not be completed overnight. It may not even be solved in one Legislative Session.

You must take the time you need to research solutions, design a funding system that provides a quality education, and takes into account taxpayers. These are important issues. Montana's future literally depends on them. My staff and I will work with you as long and as hard as it takes to make sure we get a system that is right for Montana's kids and for Montana's future.

Until a new funding system is developed and implemented, I offer you as a “Bridge to the Future” my three bills for funding options that our schools desperately need now.

1. House Bill 125, carried by Rep. Holly Raser, will be in committee later this afternoon. HB 125 increases the basic and per-student entitlement by \$350 per elementary student and \$200 per high school student. Also included in the calculation is the inflation adjustment as adopted by the 2003 Legislature. Thank you, Rep. Raser!
2. House Bill 111, carried by Rep. Gary Branae, creates a new funding mechanism that responds to Montana’s decline in school enrollment. HB 111 recognizes that with the decrease of a few students in a school, the school still needs to provide third grade, fourth grade, and so on, and needs to offer music, PE, Library, and still needs to turn on the heat and lights, but now has significantly less funding. HB 111 provides school districts a \$1,000 per-educator entitlement based on the number of professional staff. The local school trustees decide how the funds best serve their students. Thank you, Rep. Branae!
3. House Bill 47 provides full-time funding for kindergarten students. This bill does not require schools to offer full-time kindergarten, nor does it require parents to enroll their child in full-time kindergarten. Children who are enrolled in full-time kindergarten programs demonstrate:
  - Greater progress in literacy, math and general learning skills,
  - Significant gains in social and emotional development,
  - Fewer student grade retentions and special education placements, which saves the state money,
  - Higher scores on achievement tests,
  - And, reduced behavioral problems.

HB 47, carried by Rep. Kathleen Galvin-Halcro, gives some of our most vulnerable kids a helping hand. This bill is all about kids and local control and parental choice. My thanks to you, Rep. Galvin-Halcro!

Recruiting and retaining high quality teachers in Montana is one of our most significant challenges. Central to this challenge is our beginning teacher’s salaries that rank 50<sup>th</sup> in the nation – dead last - - and too many of our teachers lack health benefits. Unless we can find ways to help schools attract and keep high quality teachers, we will continue to see good teachers leave our state. Without question, quality teachers are at the core of a quality education.

## Reading

A top priority of my administration is reading.

As a longtime teacher and school librarian, I’ve seen how the demand for high levels of literacy has never been greater than it is today. The doors to school success, higher education and a good job will never open for many students, if we do not put a real focus on reading in our schools. We must ensure that our students’ skills keep pace with society’s demands of living in an information age that changes rapidly and is showing no signs of slowing down.

We know that if a student isn't reading at the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade level by the end of third grade, it is very difficult and very expensive to catch up. If they can't read they can't do social studies or science or read math problems. Lack of reading skills, is also a common reason for dropping out of school.

I began tackling this challenge four years ago by building reading partnerships and aggressively going after funding to support reading efforts in our classrooms.

Every summer teachers gather together for my READ Montana! Summit, affectionately known around the state as the "Summit on a Shoestring." We learn new techniques for teaching reading and explore how we want Montana's students to become successful readers.

So far, our office has competed for and received \$33 million in federal reading funds to target children in kindergarten through third grade. We've been able to put some concentrated programs in several schools across the state.

We've kicked off two efforts that partner reading and wellness.

- Our partnership with the Department of Public Health and Human Services, called the "The Reading Well – Be Well, Read Well," provides a free book to all newly immunized kindergarteners. We like to think that it takes the "sting out of immunizations."
- And "Food for the Mind", a partnership with MSU Team Nutrition and the Montana Reading Council, gives K-3 classrooms a book bag, filled with fun books on nutrition and physical activity, for students to take home and enjoy with their parents.

These efforts are beginning to make a difference in our schools. For example, Longfellow Elementary school in Great Falls, a recipient of our reading grants has seen a 16 point increase in fourth grade reading scores in the last three years. This is very significant progress. We will continue to build upon these successes.

### Generations

Montanans have always placed a high value on education.

Perhaps folks who value education the most are those who weren't in a position to take it for granted. You helped make the value of an education possible for many Montanans. Senate Bill 81, from last session, carried by Senator Cooney, enables me to award an Honorary High School diploma to World War II, Korean War and Vietnam War veterans who did not receive a High School diploma because of military service.

One day these individuals were carrying textbooks, and the next day they were carrying weapons to protect our nation and preserve our freedom. After the war, many never returned to school, but began families and careers. They became role models and leaders in their communities.

Following the session in 2003, I hosted a graduation ceremony in the Capitol Rotunda for the first 16 veterans, some of whom had waited 60 years to receive their high school diploma.

There was not a dry eye in the audience as veterans walked proudly to the stage to receive their diploma. Mr. Knoll's personal thank you note told me of the 3,511 miles he and his wife journeyed

from Southwest Missouri back to his home state of Montana to attend this graduation. Others traveled shorter distances, like the van carrying four veterans from the Columbia Falls Veterans Home and Mr. Little Dog from Browning whose proud granddaughter joined him to share his education moment. The stories go on and on and on.

Each and every one of the almost 300 honorary high school diplomas I have awarded to a veteran is associated with a personal and touching family story -- a story that embodies the importance of public education and our dreams. Thank you for making possible the education dreams of these veterans and their families.

We have a veteran with us today, who like my father, is committed to their children and grandchildren's dreams. And, like my father, did not graduate from High School and served in WWII. I'd like to introduce you to Adam Schweitzer, our Governor's father.

The Governor and I, two members of Montana's Executive Branch were blessed to have parents who valued education. As fathers you play a very important role in our lives. You not only have inspired us by your commitment to our country, but your commitment to education left a legacy of learning.

Mr. Schweitzer, it is a great honor and a pleasure to be able to award you a long awaited honorary high school diploma that acknowledges a lifetime of learning and achievement that has enriched the State of Montana and our country.

Congratulations to both you and my Dad, two very deserving veterans and fathers.

Montanans' commitment to education is timeless, even though the educational needs of our country have changed since WW II.

Fifty years ago our economy was dependent on 60% of our workforce being unskilled labor, 20% skilled labor and 20% professional workers. Fast forward to 2005 where 20% of our workforce is still professional. But our demand for unskilled labor has dropped to 15% and skilled labor increased three fold. Now 65% of our economy depends on skilled labor.

The focus in our schools has also changed. Think about it, kindergarten teachers are preparing their five year old students for career options that do not even exist today. That's how important education is to our economy!

### Students

Let me take a moment and tell you about the importance of a quality education for one student I taught in elementary school. He was born several years after the state had ratified those 15 important words in the state Constitution. He had good teachers (especially his school librarian) and he worked hard.

It doesn't seem like very long ago that I saw his class off when they graduated from 8<sup>th</sup> grade, but I know he went on and received a great high school education in Missoula. This student went on to serve his country in Iraq. Then he returned to Montana, and went to school at the University of Montana...and then last year he did the strangest thing...

He ran for the State Legislature.

Now he has a desk right here in the third row of this chamber, representing the people of House District 91. Permit me to recognize my student, Representative Kevin Furey.

I am extremely proud to be one of Representative Furey's teachers, to know that the lessons I taught him will not only have an impact on his life, but on those he represents.

We are proud of our Montana students and their test scores. Montana kids continue to score near the top in the nation in reading, science, and math. That's great. But that's not good enough. Because now our kids are competing internationally. They're competing with students from South Korea and South Vietnam as much as they're competing with students from South Dakota and South Carolina. Kids from other states and countries that invest in education are catching up to us or passing us. Working together we need to make sure this trend doesn't continue. Your work this session is vital to these efforts.

### Closing

Our kids are our future. They will become tomorrow's business, spiritual, community and school leaders. They will also become Montana's Legislators, Senators, Governors, Supreme Court Justices and State Superintendents.

It is our kids that will hold us to those 15 words in our State Constitution:

*"The legislature shall provide a basic system of free quality public elementary and secondary schools."*

I have great faith in the commitment of the Montana Legislature to roll up your sleeves to move education forward in Montana. Together we will do what's right for Montana's kids.

Thanks to the students and educators all across Montana who tuned in to watch the Legislature today.

On behalf of Montana's 146,519 school children and all who work on behalf of public education in our state, I thank you for your time today and your interest in Montana's public schools.

My door is always open and I look forward to your visit.